



Multiple Rockview Stakeholders
c/o ClearWater Conservancy
2555 N. Atherton St.
State College, PA 16803

March 5th, 2026

Honorable Governor Shapiro
508 Main Capital Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: Rockview SCI Closure

Dear Governor Shapiro,

In your governance of the Commonwealth, closing SCI Rockview is just one difficult decision of many. For those of us in central Pennsylvania, however, the effects of this decision have been tremendous. As you know, the workforce and economic repercussions have been harsh; harder for some than others.

The purpose of this letter is to look ahead. The 5,800 acres of Rockview lands define Happy Valley much as Mount Nittany, Beaver Stadium, and the Spring Creek Canyon. The agricultural landscape tells us, subtly yet unmistakably, that we are traveling between two distinct population centers – Bellefonte and State College. The open, expansive property provides critical groundwater recharge for Spring Creek and a forested ridgeline visible from *everywhere* across the region.

We understand that the future of the SCI Rockview lands is uncertain at this time. However, given the importance of this land on local, regional, and state-wide scales, we respectfully request that the decision-making process regarding its future be fully transparent and include public input. We look forward to joining with other community stakeholders to support the land use planning process.

Here, we wish to share a vision for the property – one that preserves its unique cultural heritage, serves the public good, and sustains natural resource values for generations to come.

Public Good

Centre County has unique opportunities for economic development. The Chamber of Business and Industry in Centre County has recently created an Economic Development Strategic Plan that outlines twelve goals. Thoughtful reuse of some of the Rockview property could help our community thrive by addressing two specific goals:

- *Amplify Happy Valley as Central PA's tourism, outdoor recreation, and sports destination hub*
- *Invest in placemaking and social gathering spots throughout the county*

Easy access to outdoor recreation is an important part of central Pennsylvania's quality of life and an essential component for our economic development. Spring Creek is an international angler destination *because* of the healthy, wild trout population, and it must be protected. A new public access trail connecting Mount Nittany to the Spring Creek Canyon through a forested corridor would continue the legacy of this public land providing public benefit forever. In addition, strengthened and expanded access to Mount Nittany Conservancy's trail system would enhance the outdoor experience on the peak of Mount Nittany overlooking Happy Valley. In addition to outdoor recreation, there are many other potential land uses that would serve the public good.

Sustained Agricultural Production

Since 1915, SCI Rockview has embodied the farming and forestry roots of central Pennsylvania. Active farming was integral to the institutional program which provided inmates with improved conditions, less overcrowding, and productive employment skills.

The valley lands of Rockview are prime agricultural soils. Maintaining agricultural lands on this property is important for the cultural association of this landscape and for food security. A loss of farmland at Rockview on top of the negative impacts the 322 Connector highway project will have on farmland in Centre County could have a serious impact on the combined capacity and profitability of the farming community. Similarly, the actively managed forests on Mount Nittany improve forest health, secure scenic vistas, and yield forest products.

Ecological Services

The hydrologic role of the prison land is invisible, and, therefore, often underappreciated. For a thousand years, and longer, this land has provided high quality groundwater recharge and a steady supply of cold groundwater to Spring Creek. Most of the property is classified as High or Above Average groundwater recharge potential by the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. Any plans to develop portions of the site will need to carefully and completely address water quality impacts, including temperature, from stormwater management and sewage treatment systems.

The summit of Mount Nittany is conserved by the Mount Nittany Conservancy because its iconic topographic feature defines Nittany Valley, Happy Valley, and Penns Valley. Due to its intact and connected forest cover, Mount Nittany serves as a dispersal pathway for climate adaptation of wild species (e.g. The Nature Conservancy Resilient Land Mapping Tool). Restoring a forested

connection from Mount Nittany to the Spring Creek Canyon would advance the goal of improving habitat connectivity across valleys and reinforce the strong *pride of place* that defines our community.

The Vision

Given these values, we believe that the following opportunities could be accommodated in the Commonwealth's planning for this landscape.

- The mountain top and side remain in active forestry.
- Productive farmland is maintained in the valley.
- A forested wildlife corridor reconnects the side of Mount Nittany with the Spring Creek Canyon to improve habitat conditions and cool runoff.
- A public access trail connects Mount Nittany to the Spring Creek Canyon through this forested wildlife corridor, continuing the legacy of this public land by providing public access.
- A new trailhead improves access for Mount Nittany Conservancy's trail system and takes pressure off the Lemont trailhead.
- For any development of this property, there is no net increase in stormwater runoff and the highest standard of sewage treatment to protect Spring Creek's status as a high-quality cold-water fishery.

The organizations collaborating on this letter possess the connections, expertise, long-standing commitment, and stable capacity to make this vision a reality. We look forward to joining with other community stakeholders to form an advisory workgroup that can contribute technical expertise and community connections throughout the planning process. Importantly, we also appreciate the long-standing partnership of College and Benner Townships in managing the values addressed in this letter.

As your administration continues to consider the future of Rockview lands, we invite you or your representatives to reach out to us to explore how this much-loved property can contribute to an extraordinary future for the people of Centre County.

In gratitude and service,



Daniel M. Kniffen, President, Centre County Farm Bureau



Dan Guss, President, Centre County Farmland Trust



Mary Sorensen, Executive Director, Centre County Historical Society



Bill Smith, Centre County Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps



Elizabeth Crisfield, Executive Director, Clearwater Conservancy



Bob Vierck, Chairman, Keystone Water Resources Center



Catherine Cohan, Lemont Village Association



Chris Buchignani, Vice President, Mount Nittany Conservancy



Kelly Forest, Chair, Sierra Club Moshannon Group



Zach Quinby, President, Spring Creek Chapter, Trout Unlimited



Tony Gehman, Owner, TCO Fly Fishing



Judy Onufrak, Interim Executive Director, Wildlife For Everyone

Cc:

Senator Chris Dush

Representative Kerry Benninghoff

Representative Scott Conklin

Representative Paul Takac

Senator Wayne Langerholc

Dr. Laurel R. Harry (Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections)

Cindy Adams Dunn (Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources)

Stephen Smith (Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Game Commission)

Jessica Shirley (Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection)

Dr. Timothy Schaeffer (Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission)

Russell Redding, (Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture)

Andrew Dehoff (Susquehanna River Basin Commission)

Randy Brackbill (President, Spring Creek Watershed Commission)

Greg Scott (President and CEO, Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County)

Mark Higgins (Chair, Centre County Board of Commissioners)

Amber Concepcion (Vice-Chair, Centre County Board of Commissioners)

Steven Dershem (Centre County Board of Commissioners)

Adam Brumbaugh (Manager of College Township)

Randy Moyer (Chair of the Board of Supervisors, Benner Township)

Sharon Royer (Township Administrator, Benner Township)

David Capperella (Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Spring Township)

Mark Boeckel (Manager, Harris Township)

